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# Furor Builds Over Who Heads Action

An internal White House furor is boiling up over the controversial selection of a former military intelligence officer to head Action, the government's multibranched good-works agency. The move could jeopardize the safety of American volunteers abroad.

For Action's most celebrated component is the Peace Corps, whose thousands of overseas volunteers might suffer if there is suspicion that they are even remotely connected with U.S. intelligence activities.

Anti-American elements, jealous of the good will the Peace Corps volunteers have earned through their selfless efforts to help the poor and illiterate, would like nothing better than to smear them as spies.

This is no idle concern: kidnaping and death threats have resulted from scurrilous rumor campaigns, linking the Peace Corps volunteers to the CIA or other U.S. espionage organizations.

One example of this danger was Richard Starr, the Peace Corps botanist who was held for three years by communist guerrillas in Colombia, until he was ransomed a year ago. One reason he was kidnaped was because his captors suspected he was a CIA agent using the Peace Corps as a cover. He was interrogated repeatedly on this point during his captivity in the Andean jungle.

Granted, the man chosen to head

Action, Tom Pauken, had only a relatively brief connection with intelligence work. During his service in the Army, he was an intelligence officer stationed in Vietnam. He stoutly denies any CIA involvement; he told my associates Jack Mitchell and Indy Badhwar he did only routine research on North Vietnamese leaders.

But the Peace Corps historically has been careful to keep both its officials and its volunteers free of any espionage taint. Like Caesar's wife, Peace Corps personnel must be above suspicion — for their own protection if nothing else. This has been the policy ever since the agency was founded under President Kennedy.

On one occasion years ago, the agency attempted to hire an ex-intelligence official. It set off an international ruckus that embarrassed Action and virtually ruined the official's career.

Action officials and some White House insiders were appalled at Pauken's nomination. And though it is his intelligence background that upsets them most, they were also disgruntled by the manner of his selection. Pauken's name wasn't even on the list of possible nominees until the last minute, the critics claim.

Moreover, he was cleared by an old friend, White House counsel Fred Fielding, who survived the Watergate era without taint. Fielding insisted that while he was aware of the misgiv-

ings surrounding the choice of Pauken, they were "not a problem."

Pauken, an amiable 36-year-old Texan, figured in a minor controversy in 1971, when he was associate director of the White House Fellows program. He was roundly denounced for writing an article in U.S. News and World Report on an unofficial trip to the Soviet Union.

His boss at the time, David Miller, called Pauken's action "disloyal, selfish and immature." Another colleague wrote that he had "damaged the Fellows program by some basically deviant techniques."

That little-noticed internecine wrangle doesn't enter into Pauken's present situation. It's his intelligence past that troubles key administration and agency officials — and could haunt the Peace Corps.

Footnote: Pauken said he thought it would be unfair to be "penalized" for his volunteer military service.